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WHY SPIES DEFECT

B Y R O B E R T M O S S

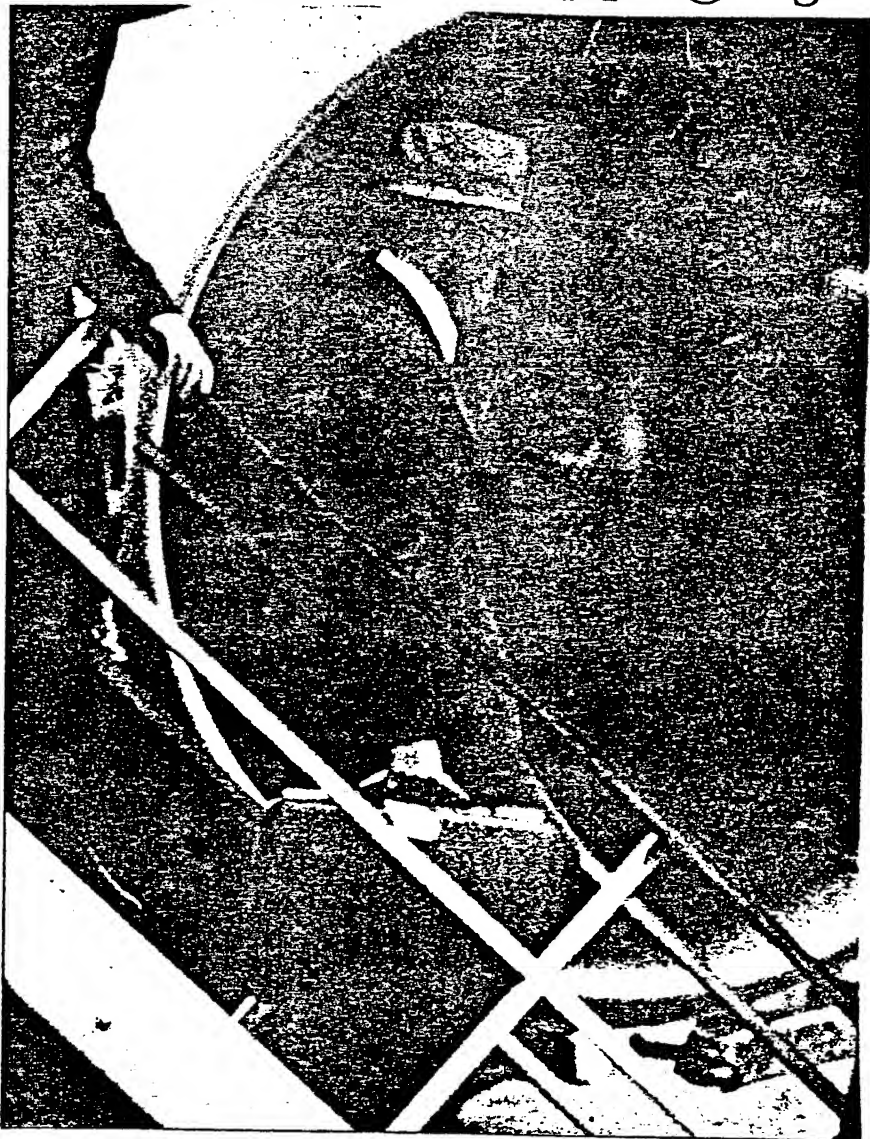
A YOUNG RUSSIAN LISTED as a second secretary at the Soviet Mission in Geneva sidled up to a Western diplomat attending a United Nations conference a few years back and murmured, "I think Brezhnev stinks."

As "Andrei"—who at that time was also a major in the Soviet military intelligence service, the GRU—tells the story, he went home thinking, "There, it's done. I've defected." But, to his amazement, there was no follow-up. The Western diplomat apparently didn't think there was anything extraordinary about attacking Brezhnev. After all, his American colleagues were less than reverent about President Reagan. It took Andrei two more approaches before his signals were read correctly. Eventually, he was helped to escape to the West with his wife and children—and has become an invaluable source on the secret workings of the GRU.

The episode tells us a good deal about the chasm of understanding that divides Soviet society from our own. It also poses the question: Given the awesome risks involved, what drives Soviet spies to defect to the West?

Defector is a word with a sour taste to it. It has the same stem as "defective." In Latin, the verb *deficere* means "to fail or be wanting." Yet, as a senior Western counterintelligence official who has debriefed many of the most important KGB defectors, observes, "These men aren't failures. One common denominator is high intelligence, combined with self-confidence, even arrogance, and the conviction that it's possible to beat the system."

Oleg Bitov speaks for many Soviets who have chosen the West when he says proudly, "I have not defected from my people or my country. I have come to the West to help them." Bitov is the former foreign editor of *Literary Gazette*, familiarly known in Moscow as "KGB Gazette" because it is used to provide cover for operatives of that Soviet secret



Soviet MiG pilot Viktor Belenko, who defected in 1976, arrives in Los Angeles.

police and intelligence agency and as an outlet for propaganda. Bitov seized his chance, during a visit to the Venice Film Festival last September, to make contact with British officials. He is now living in England.

One of the main factors in Bitov's decision to defect was that he had expected a thaw in the Soviet treatment of writers' and ideas after Brezhnev's death. Instead,

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